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ADVICE TO STUDENTS

HAVING IN VIEW

CHRISTIAN MINISTRY;

ADDRESSED TO THEM

AT THE ACADEMY IN BRISTOL,

APRIL 12, 1770.

BY C. EVANS, D.D.



ADDRESS TO THE STUDENTS, &c.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

CONVINCED, as I am persuaded you are, of my unfeigned affection for you, and the fervent concern I feel to promote your highest interest, I cannot doubt your receiving, with a spirit of meekness and of love, that advice which, with a sincere view to your improvement, I shall now take leave freely to offer.

The character of *a Minister of Christ* which you either sustain in some measure already, or for which you are candidates, is a character inconceivably awful, as well as one of the most honourable and amiable in the world. Much depends upon the faithful discharge of the duties that are annexed to it. The rewards of the diligent, laborious, upright, Minister of Christ will be glorious; but the doom of the wicked slothful Servant will, on the other hand, be infinitely tremendous. *We watch for Souls*, said the Apostle Paul, *as those that must give an account.*

Let me then advise you, my young Friends, seriously to reflect on your views in devoting yourselves to this sacred employ. Was it merely to have an opportunity of pursuing different branches of literature, to which you had perhaps a strong natural inclination? Was it that you might lead an easy genteel life, which you might be ready to suppose a Minister's life to be? Was it to obtain popular applause and fame, which you might fondly hope your abilities would procure you? Or was it from a principle of unfeigned love to *Jesus Christ* and to the Souls of men? The question our Lord repeatedly put to Peter, *Lovest thou me?* is a question I would earnestly entreat you to consider him as addressing to you; and let it be your daily concern to be able affectionately to reply, *Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.*

I was much pleased with the account I lately met with of an answer made by a venerable Minister to a young man, who asked how he might learn to be a good and useful Preacher. *Si multum ames Christum: you must learn to be a zealous lover of Christ.*

When you are satisfied with respect to your views and intentions, it will naturally be your next concern to use all those means by which you may hope, with the divine blessing, to be thoroughly furnished for the acceptable and useful discharge of the office before you. Here the duties

DR. EVANS'S ADDRESS

duties of the closet, such as reading the word of God with other practical and experimental writings, meditation, self-examination and prayer, have undoubtedly the first and principal claim to your regard. I would fain hope that *one hour* at least will be devoted every morning and evening to these exercises: rather neglect all your business than this which is so intimately connected with your improvement in the divine life. Mr. Bennet's Christian Oratory will be an excellent directory to you in the discharge of these duties, and I would therefore earnestly recommend it to your serious perusal. If you are not *lively Christians*, you are not likely to be either *comfortable or useful Ministers*: and remember, *bene orasse est bene studuisse.*

Let me next exhort you to the vigorous pursuit of your other studies in general. There is scarcely any branch of knowledge but may be useful to a Minister: Whatever hath a tendency to enlarge our ideas of the divine perfections, to give us a clearer view of the meaning of Scripture and the evidences of its authenticity, or to enable us to speak and write our thoughts with propriety, perspicuity, and energy, is certainly well worth the attention of every candidate for the ministry. And is there not something very animating in the thought that all the knowledge you acquire, you have reason to hope, may redound to the glory of your great Master; that every acquisition you make, in the several branches of literature you attend to, furnishes you with a fresh, humble, offering to lay at the feet of your adorable Redeemer? And it is amazing to think what a progress may be made in almost every branch of knowledge, with but a tolerable capacity, where *Diligence, Regularity, Steadiness, and Perseverance* are exercised.

Suffer me then, in the strongest manner, to exhort you.

I. To *Diligence*: in order to which, think of the worth of time—the uncertainty of it—the awful account that must be given of it—the many ways in which it is unnecessarily and uselessly squandered away; and what a variety of methods there are by which it may be, in a manner, redeemed.

I've lost a day!—The Prince who nobly cried,
Had been an Emperor, without his crown;
Of Rome? Say rather Lord of human race;
He speaks as if deputed by mankind;
So should all speak; so reason speaks in all. YOUNG.

And to the same purpose are the following animated lines by another hand.

To-morrow didst thou say?
Methought I heard Horatio say To-morrow!

Go to---I will not hear of it---To-morrow !

'Tis a sharper that stakes his penury
Against thy plenty ; that takes thy ready cash
And pays thee nought but wishes, hopes, and promises,
The currency of Idiots. Injurious Bankrupt,
That gulls the easy creditor---To-morrow
It is a period no where to be found,
Unless perchance in the fool's calendar :
Wisdom disdains the word, nor holds Society
With those who own it.

It is amazing to think, says Mr. Mason, in his *Student and Pastor*, how much time may be gained by a proper economy, and how much good literature may be acquired, if that gain be rightly applied : and to this purpose he recommends such rules as these.

Take particular notice of those things which are most apt to rob you of your time ; and upon such an inquest, he observes, you will most probably detect the following thieves.

1. *The Bed.* Never allow yourselves more than six hours sleep at most. Physicians all tell you that nature demands no more for the proper recruit of health and spirits : all beyond this is luxury, no less prejudicial to the animal constitution than intemperate meals ; and no less hurtful to the powers of the mind than to those of the body ; it insensibly weakens and relaxes both.

2. *Ceremonious and formal visits :* Amici fures temporis.

3. *Indolence :* indulging a slow, heavy, inactive disposition ; or deferring to a future time, necessary business which ought to be set about immediately : idle musing or indulging chimerical imaginations. No habit grows faster by indulgence, exposes to more temptations, or renders a man more uneasy to himself, and more unprofitable to others.

4. *Reading useless books.* We should remember the *cui bono?* and ask ourselves how far this is likely to improve our usefulness, or add to our reputation, under that character we are about to sustain.

Lastly.—Much time is lost by an attempt to force the mind to a study to which it is not inclined, or by which the faculties are already fatigued. *Nil invita Minerva.* The mind is sometimes more refreshed by variety than rest.

Be always beforehand with your business.

Post eft occasio calva. Whatever must be done and may be done now, as well as hereafter, for that very reason had better be done now.

Let your relaxations from business be only with a view to fit you the better to return to it again. And,

Finally

Finally. Whatever your hands find to do, do it with your might.

Next to diligence in general I would recommend,

II. *Regularity.* Rise early and go to bed betimes. The great Dr. Owen declared in his latter days, that he would gladly have parted with all the learning he had acquired in his younger time by sitting up late, provided he could but have the health and firmness of constitution which he believed he lost by his midnight studies. Go to bed, at the latest, by eleven, and rise at five. Devote a certain number of hours in every day to your studies, and let nothing but absolute necessity tempt you to break in upon that number. Let the proper employment of every day be attended to in its day. Endeavour well to understand one branch of knowledge before you enter upon another. *Festina lente;* and let those of your studies which require the most intense application, be pursued in those hours wherein your thoughts are most composed and free; in the morning, for instance, and in the evening. *Aurora Musis amica, nec non vespera.* There is a time for all things, and every thing is beautiful in its season. The afternoon, says Mr. Mason, will suffice for History, Politics, News, Travels, and the common run of Pamphlets: and books of entertainment should only amuse a dull hour when you are fit for nothing else. To apply your early time, or free thoughts to these, is like drinking wine in a morning.

To Diligence and Regularity it is very necessary to add,

III. *Steadiness.* To be diligent to-day and idle to-morrow; regular to-day and all confusion on the morrow, will answer but little purpose. It is an excellent rule for the conduct of Students, *Nulla dies sine linea.* And if you would really advance in knowledge, you must learn to be patient of labour. The more you accustom yourselves to laborious thinking, the better you will bear it, so that the mind be not jaded by it: many a man of good genius, for want of steadiness, has become a mere Pedant, instead of a sound Scholar. Rather covet to understand and digest what you read, than superficially to read much. Seneca's observation, *distrahit animum librorum multitudo,* has much truth in it; and, as Mr. Mason well remarks, By being masters of every subject as you proceed, tho' you make but a small progress in reading, you will make a speedy one in useful knowledge.

IV. *Perseverance* is indispensably necessary to crown the whole. Pursue and finish whatever you have, with deliberation, entered upon.

Much

Much time, says the author before named, is often lost by vain attempts, and leaving useful designs imperfect; for, as he who begins to build an house but never completes it, must set down to his loss the greatest part of the money thus expended; so a Student who desists from a work, (*ré infectâ*) wherein he has taken much pains, is chargeable with as fruitless an expense of his time, as the other is of his *money*. This observation you will find peculiarly important with respect to the composition of Sermons.

In order to secure to yourselves, in the most effectual manner, the advantage arising from those improvements, which, by observing the directions given above, you will not fail to make as you go on in your studies; and that you may be enabled to lay up the knowledge you acquire for future ready use, I would advise each of you to procure

I. An interleaved Bible. In this repository you may store up all such valuable Scripture criticisms, illustrations of particular passages, or striking observations, whether of a doctrinal or practical nature, as you may happen to meet with in reading or conversation, or which may occur to your own mind, and you may think worth preserving. If you have the Authors in which you meet with any thing of this kind, references to them will be sufficient. You might make this interleaved Bible an index to all the printed Sermons you are possessed of.

II. A general common-place book you will also find to be peculiarly useful.

Mr. Locke's method appears to me the most eligible, or the common method of accompt books will very well answer the end. In this book you may insert abstracts of what you read on all subjects indiscriminately, quotations of remarkable passages or references, only taking care to range every subject under those general heads to which they may respectively belong. A common place book of this kind, judiciously used, will be a mean of sensibly accumulating a stock of useful knowledge, and furnishing you with some valuable thoughts upon most Subjects, which, as occasion requires, you may use with great advantage: nothing is more likely, as a mean, to enable you, with the good householder, to bring out of your treasury things new and old.

Before I close this address, permit me to caution you against that *pride* which is too apt to grow up with our intellectual improvements. I cannot more fully express my sentiments to you upon this subject than in the words of

8 DR. EVANS'S ADDRESS

of one of my own late Tutors, in an address to his Pupils, similar to that which I am now making to you: "Pride (says Dr. Gibbons) is the greatest obstacle to improvement, and that proverb has its foundation in truth---*modi ad scientiam pervenissent, si se illuc pervenisse non parassent.* Let a person's accomplishments be what they may, pride, like the filthy, devouring, insect on the blooming rose, will marr the beauty of all its attainments, and destroy their perfumes. Don't think because you know a little, that you know all; give yourselves no superior airs of vanity; nor tell the world, either by your speech or behaviour that you have a high opinion of yourselves, and are the first to discover and fall in love with your own excellencies. You may look down upon the illiterate part of mankind and think you are above them in your attainments, as one emmet, climbing up the side of an ant-hill, may vaunt it over his fellow emmet that is creeping at the bottom: but turn your eye upward; think what heights are above you, and be assured that, with every step you advance, still wider and wider regions of knowledge will unfold themselves to your view;" and you will soon be convinced that you have reason still to be humble: and remember, whilst the world takes a pleasure in mortifying pride, it generally favours humility. On this subject let me particularly recommend to you Dr. Watts's most excellent discourse, entitled, *Humility represented in the character of St. Paul:* a Book which I think no Student or young Minister should be without.

On the subject of preaching I shall not now offer any thoughts of my own, nor indeed does it appear necessary: every thing I would recommend on this capital branch of your intended office, as Ministers of Christ, is already so judiciously represented by several Authors, that I know not how to add any thing material to what they have said: permit me then here only to recommend to your serious and frequent perusal, the first part of *Dr. Watts's humble attempt for the revival of religion.* *Mr. Jennings's two Discourses on preaching Christ, and experimental preaching;* and Professor Frank's Letter concerning the most useful way of preaching.

I cannot conclude without just reminding you that as it is the highest ambition your Friends and Tutors indulge respecting you, to see you able, faithful, and successful, *Ministers of the New Testament;* so, by uniformly supporting this character, you will most effectually secure the peace of your own minds and the approbation of God,

CALEB EVANS.

BRISTOL, April 12, 1770.

